Israel Through a Reconstructionist Lens

Text used or cited in this discussion

The Guiding Values of Progressive Zionism

What is Progressive Zionism?

1. Existential Values:
    a. National liberation of the Jewish people / self-determination
    b. Freedom from antisemitism / global refuge for Jews

2. Expressions of the Biblical Prophetic Tradition
    a. Justice / *Tzedek*
    b. Peace / *Shalom*

3. Modern Enlightenment Values
    a. Democracy
    b. Religious freedom
    c. Civil Rights

4. Coexistence Values
    a. Territorial Compromise
    b. Balancing Jewish rights with the rights of the Palestinians & all non-Jews

Ethical Nationhood: Manifesting the best of Jewish values, beliefs, and culture as a nation

Varieties of pre-1948 Zionism

1. Labor Zionist: Secular, socialist Jewish state.
    a. *Built kibbutzim,* powerful labor unions, a strong welfare state with national insurance, celebrated May Day, and established socialist Jewish youth groups.

2. Revisionist Zionism: Founded by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, after splitting from Labor Zionist.

    a. Demanding nothing less than the entire territory of the original that Britain had held.
    b. Supporting a free market liberal economic system. Founding philosophy of the Likud Party of contemporary Israel.

3. Religious Zionism: believe of a renewal of Jewish political thought combined with a devotion of Torah and an Orthodox understanding of its commandments.
    a. Most famous advocate: Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, chief rabbi of British mandate Palestine.
    b. In part an Orthodox answer to the strong anti-Zionist tendencies that dominated much of the Orthodox world in the early 20th Century.

4. Cultural Zionism: Founded by Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg). Prioritized the revitalization of Jewish culture and creativity, through immigration, education an an openness to modern innovations in Jewish practice and belief.

A Theory of Judaism: Evolving Religious Civilization

1. **Evolving**: it has changes in every era

2. **Religious**: it's a "ground-up" expression of our people's 3,500 year long efforts to understand God and bring godliness into the world.

3. **Civilization**: it's more than the religion – it also includes arts, literature, languages, culture(s), foods, history, connection to homeland & sacred places, etc.

Kaplan's Zionism

1. Jewish Survival:
2. Jewish Cultural & Religious Renaissance:
3. Ethical Nationhood:
4. Active Symbiotic Relationship with Diaspora

Where Do We Go From Here?

What does seeing Israel through a Reconstructionist lens ask of us and issues are we confronting in the short-term future?

Further Reading Texts and Sources

- Joint Israel Commission
- Shutafut
- Positions and Statements on Israel
- Evolve on Israel/Palestine
- More Israel Resources

Speaker Bios

Rabbi Maurice Harris, Associate Director for Thriving Communities and Israel Affairs Specialist, Reconstructing Judaism

Ordained by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in 2003, Rabbi Maurice Harris served as Associate Rabbi and Head of School at Temple Beth Israel in Eugene, Oregon, from 2003 – 2011. He has also worked as a Judaic studies faculty member at the University of Oregon, teaching courses such as "Israelis and Palestinians" and "American Jewish Cultures." Just prior to joining the staff at RRC, Maurice worked as the Rabbi/Senior Educator at InterfaithFamily, a Boston-based national Jewish non-profit that provides resources and advocacy for interfaith families in the Jewish community. He is the author of three books, *Moses: A Stranger Among Us*, *Leviticus: You Have No Idea* and *The Forgotten Sage: Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah and the Birth of Judaism as We Know It* (Cascade Books, 2012, 2013, 2019).

Maurice is now working as Associate Director for Thriving Communities and Israel Affairs Specialist at Reconstructing Judaism. He is married to Melissa Crabbe, and they have two children, Clarice Harris and Hunter Harris.